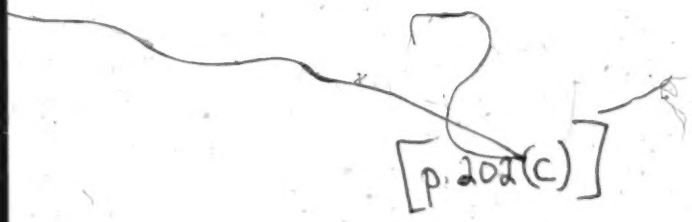

121 living rarely encountered in the modern world. As will be shown later, however, the island people maintain their simple but not uncomfortable way of
[433] living only by help from outside: if one believes that every inhabited area must make its economic contribution to the state, Inishbofin is a debtor on a considerable scale.

167 "A small and dwindling population maintain a precarious existence on the
657 Atlantic fringe of our industrial society and present upon the whole an aspect of decline and, in some parts, of dereliction." In these words the Scottish
[659] crofting report[1] names a problem, common alike to the Atlantic fringe of Ireland and of Scotland, which was investigated by two Congested Districts Boards, in Ireland from 1891–1923[2] and in Scotland from 1897–1911[3]; in both countries the powers of these boards were transferred to the general administration of agricultural affairs. One by one the islands off the west coast of Ireland are being abandoned[4] but on Inishbofin this prospect does not seem immediate: past and present government assistance has resulted in a planned

[113] [1] Department of Agriculture for Scotland, Report of the Commission of enquiry into crofting conditions. H.M.S.O., Edinburgh, 1954, Cmd. 9091, para. 281, p. 87.
[2] For a general treatment, T. W. Freeman: *Geogr. Res.*, Vol. 23, 1943, pp. 1–14.
[3] Cmd. 9091, 1954, para. 265, p. 81.
[4] T. W. Freeman: *Geogr. Journ.*, Vol. 120, 1954, p. 332.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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form the basis of a reconstructed Ireland. One of his proposals, perhaps the most original of all the varied suggestions for solving 'the Irish problem', was to import a further 200,000 English settlers so as to bring the total English population to half a million, and then to remove the 20,000 unmarried Irish girls and marry them off 'one in every English parish', replacing them by 20,000 English girls to be married to Irishmen. In this way the Irish language, food, clothing and customs would be replaced by English modes.[1] Petty's scientific approach was devoid of sentiment and left him without sympathy for the Irish past. Other seventeenth-century writers, however, interested themselves in the ancient forts and towers, and Sir James Ware, who published his *Irish Antiquities* in 1654, also collected Irish manuscripts. This antiquarianism was continued by the brothers Molyneux, whose essays were the first of countless misguided speculations on Danish Mounts and Round Towers.

The eighteenth century brought a more rational view of Ireland, thanks especially to Arthur Young, whose *Travels in Ireland* (1776–79) are justly renowned. There followed a spate of travellers throughout the nineteenth century, aided by improved communications and attracted, after 1845, by the grim spectacle of the Great Famine. Unfortunately most of the visitors, finding, in the words of the Earl of Bristol, 'nothing curious to engage admiration and nothing horrid enough to stare at', do not give us details such as contemporary travellers were eagerly gathering from remoter lands. Yet their accounts, vitiated as many of them are by prejudice and an assumption of moral superiority, do give us first-hand descriptions of conditions in rural Ireland before and after the famine. From the first decades of the nineteenth century we have valuable sources of information in the Ordnance Survey maps and letters, in the census returns and in the Statistical Surveys compiled for the Royal Dublin Society, covering nearly all the thirty-two counties of Ireland.

If we ask why so much of the past lives on in Ireland we must first notice the position of the island at the north-western extremity of the old world, the 'last outpost of Eurasia'.[2] Until

[1] Sir W. Petty, *The Political Anatomy of Ireland* (1691), 30.
[2] Grenville Cole, *Ireland the Outpost*, 9.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

continuous tradition of partnership. Rundale, as we find it in decay in the nineteenth century, was a diseased system that had outlived its purpose. A few examples will serve to illustrate the appalling conditions to which it led when the removal of traditional checks and the adoption of the potato had allowed the population to expand recklessly within the framework of an inherited system of land use and settlement.

Our first example comes from the present century, and from Co. Mayo. The clachan of Rathlackan, when the Congested Districts Board tried to disperse it in 1918, was occupied by fifty-six families whose land was scattered in 1,500 fragments, some of them no more than a dozen square yards in area (Fig. 6). A two-acre holding was split into eighteen tiny plots, and on the average twenty-seven lots were held by each farm. Such was the confusion that it was not until 1942 that the process of redistribution and consolidation of holdings was completed, with the result that 'fairly compact holdings' were provided for thirty-two families.[1]

The following quotations are from the pamphlets of an 'improving landlord' in Donegal, and refer to a period about a hundred years earlier, in the 1840s.

'We suppose it would not be believed that in this district, until very lately, fences were altogether unknown. In some instances a tenant having any part of a townland (no matter how small), had his proportion in thirty or forty different places, and without fences between them. One poor man who had his inheritance in thirty-two different places, abandoned them in utter despair of ever being able to make them out . . . The rundale system was a complete bar to any attempt at improvement; as, on a certain day, all the cattle belonging to the townland were brought from the mountains and allowed to run indiscriminately over the arable land. And in spring no individual occupier would set or sow, or labour in the fields, before a certain day, when the cattle were again sent to the hills, until after harvest. In one instance a small field of about half an acre was held by twenty-six people.'[2]

[1] *The Irish Times* (12th Jan., 1948). This was achieved only at the cost of the physical collapse of one land-officer and the mental breakdown of another.
[2] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 22, 46.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

241 [731] soil covered. There was little "field-making" at the beginning of this century, and few plots south of the terrace crest were utilized for farming. Fields on the terraces were planted yearly with potatoes and other vegetables, but in the 1920s the "eelworm" parasite invaded the island and forced the present custom of [659] fallowing plots for at least four years. This development necessitated the creation of new fields at the back, and when the government began to subsidize field making during the 1930s, and fence construction later on, another impetus to the manu- [114] facture of additional land was provided. Most of the literature pertaining to Inis Beag, influenced by nativism and primitivism, claims that field and fence building has proceeded for centuries (even millennia) and disavows the existence of indigenous soils.

221 222 241 The year in Inis Beag commences in February with the advent of spring, when seaweed is gathered, fields are manufactured, and crops are planted. Although some seaweed is collected in the summer and autumn and stored in "cocks" near the shore or in outbuildings for later use, most of it is cut and pulled in January [133] and February at the time of spring tides. There is a maximum 15¾ feet difference between flood and ebb spring tides in Inis Beag, and normally submerged reefs rich in seaweed are bared three to four hours daily for two or three days twice each month. The men await a "good strand" to gather seaweed, when the tide is lowest during the daylight hours and not influenced by wave or swell action, for this is a dangerous task which sometimes demands wading in water thigh deep. The folk are amused greatly by a sequence from a noted film about them depicting a woman carrying seaweed along the coast during a raging storm; the footage was created by the producer to satisfy esthetic canons and to portray the primitive and Celtic virtues.

241 The generic term for natural fertilizers is "manure" and includes seaweed, compost, and guano. The islanders also use chemical fertilizers to some extent, particularly in areas where soils are deficient in manganese. Compost varies much in composition and may include human and animal feces, called "dung," turf ashes, and decaying vegetable matter, such as ferns and the sod "scraws" of thatched roofs [524] being dismantled. Nowhere in the literature is the use of human manure mentioned, and the folk are extremely secretive about its use, as they also are about burning cow dung for fuel in times of emergency. Their reticence about disclos- [654] ing these practices is a product of sexual puritanism. Young farmers are more willing than their elders to follow the advice of the Department of Agriculture agent stationed in a neighboring island, and are coming to use chemical fertilizers more commonly than was the case in the past. The islanders eschew artificial commodities which impinge on the human body, and often I have heard chemical fertilizers denounced because they supposedly are manufactured from "bones of evil persons buried in cemeteries" on the Continent, or victims of the plague centuries ago. Some farmers hold artificial fertilizers to blame for both the potato blight and the eelworm parasite.

824 Four kinds of seaweed are utilized by the folk: ribbon weed, string weed or sea thong, red or May weed, and black weed or bladder wrack. The most commonly used variety is red weed, once the major source of kelp, which is washed in [437] the year around and is stripped of its leaves when collected. Its stems are known